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Hearing Set On Stadium

By **CARRIE BUDOFF**
The Hartford Courant

March 28, 2000

EAST HARTFORD - For the first time since the state proposed building a University of Connecticut football stadium at Rentschler Field, residents will have a chance to question the officials planning the \$91 million project.

The state Office of Policy and Management has scheduled a public hearing for April 6 at the Community Cultural Center to seek comments for the project's environmental impact evaluation, a document that will examine the stadium's effect on the community.

State officials also plan to form a series of neighborhood groups to gather comments and share information on the 40,000-seat stadium. The state used a similar format in Hartford to gauge neighborhood reaction to Adriaen's Landing, a \$771 million commercial development proposed for the riverfront.

In recent weeks, residents have criticized East Hartford leaders for a dearth of public dialogue on the stadium issue since Gov. John G. Rowland announced the plans in November.

Former Republican Mayor Susan G. Knip told the town council last week that she would arrange a hearing if no one else stepped forward.

Town leaders have said they wanted to wait until the legislature approved funding for the stadium before arranging a forum. The legislature is expected to vote on funding for the stadium and Adriaen's Landing by May.

But Mayor Timothy D. Larson said he would now help the state officials with the public hearing and the neighborhood groups.

"I want this to be informational, not pro

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"I want this to be informational, not pro or con," Larson said. "I do not want this to be a start-the-stadium or stop-the-stadium demonstration. I want to get information out to the people."

Leonard Frost Jr., a Silver Lane resident who lives close to the 75 acres where the stadium would be built, said he plans to press the state for road improvements, because without them, game day traffic would "wreak havoc with the neighborhood."

"Hopefully, the meetings will bring out enough people, pro and con, who want to speak about the stadium," said Frost, 45.

Pressure is on the state to build the stadium because the UConn football program needs a venue with at least 30,000 seats by 2003, to allow its move from Division I-A in the Big East from Division I-AA in the Atlantic 10 Conference.

The stadium was originally part of the riverfront development project in Hartford until November, when United Technologies Corp. offered to donate land from its former airfield.

At the public meetings, the state will seek comment on issues ranging from transportation and air quality to noise and groundwater. The recommendations will be incorporated into the environmental impact evaluation, which could be completed as early as summer.

The evaluation would be used during the design phase of the stadium and environmental permitting process, said Phil McLellan, a planning analyst supervisor with the state Office of Policy and Management.

The public hearing will be at the East Hartford Community Cultural Center, 50 Chapman Place. An open house will start at 6 p.m. and the formal hearing will follow at 7 p.m.

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